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OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL
COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES

AMERICAN SAMOA

Working paper prepared by the Secretariat

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AMERICAN SAMOA 1/

I. GENERAL

1. American Samoa, a territory administered by the United States of America, is located in the South Pacific approximately 3,700 kilometres south-west of Hawaii and 4,350 kilometres north-east of Australia. It consists of six islands (Tutuila, Aunuu, Ofu, Olosega, Tau and Rose) belonging to the Samoan group. Swains Island, 340 kilometres north of Tutuila, is administered as an integral part of American Samoa. The total land area of the Territory is 197 square kilometres, about 70 per cent of which is covered by dense forest. Lying near the equator, between latitudes 13 and 16 south, American Samoa has a typical tropical climate with a wet and a dry season. Pago Pago, the capital, is located on Tutuila, the largest of the islands, where 90 per cent of the population lives.

2. According to statistics prepared by the Government of American Samoa, the estimated population of the Territory as of 1 July 1993 was 52,900, 2/ an increase of about 13 per cent compared with the official 1990 census (46,773 persons). The current population density is estimated at approximately 255 persons per square kilometre, an average figure for the South Pacific. Over 88 per cent of the residents of the Territory are ethnically Samoan.

3. Because of limited employment opportunities, a large number of American Samoans have emigrated to the United States. It is estimated that some 65,000 live in California and in Washington State, and 20,000 in Hawaii. 3/ Anyone born in American Samoa is a United States national and entitled to a modified United States passport. The only substantial legal difference between a citizen and a national is that the latter, as a non-citizen, cannot vote in United States presidential elections while in the Territory.

II. CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

4. American Samoa became an unincorporated Territory of the United States pursuant to a joint congressional resolution of 20 February 1929. By an executive order issued in 1951, the President of the United States placed the administration of the Territory under the Secretary of the Interior. The Territory's first Constitution came into effect in October 1960 following a referendum, and was revised in 1967 and subsequently amended in 1970 and 1977.

5. Since January 1981, American Samoa has elected by direct vote a non-voting delegate to the United States House of Representatives. The current delegate, Mr. Eni F. H. Faleomavaega, was re-elected in November 1994.

6. The Constitution provides for separate executive and legislative branches and an independent judiciary. All American Samoan citizens over 18 years of age are eligible to vote.

Executive

7. The executive branch consists of a Governor and a Lieutenant-Governor elected for four years by universal adult suffrage. The Governor is responsible for executing those United States laws and portions of the United States Constitution applicable to American Samoa, as well as the American Samoan code and executive rules. He has general supervision of all operations within the Territory. The current Governor, Mr. A. P. Lutali, was elected in November 1992 concurrently with the Lieutenant-Governor, Mr. Tauese Sunia. 4/

Legislature

8. There is a bicameral legislature, known as the Fono, comprising a Senate and a House of Representatives with identical powers. The Fono may pass laws with respect to all local affairs, provided its laws are not inconsistent with United States laws in force in the Territory or with United States treaties or international agreements. The Fono convenes for two 45-day sessions a year.

Judiciary

9. The judiciary consists of a high court with jurisdiction throughout the Territory, a district court and several village courts. There are three divisions of the High Court: (a) appellate; (b) trial; and (c) land and title. Since American Samoa is not part of a federal judicial district or circuit, there are no statutory provisions for appealing decisions of the High Court.

III. ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

A. General

10. American Samoa suffers from the same economic constraints, such as geographical isolation and scarce resources, common to most island societies in the South Pacific. Its economy depends on the tuna fish canning industry. Prospects for agricultural development are limited owing to the small percentage of land suitable for cultivation. With respect to other industries, only tourism offers good potential for growth.

11. In 1992, the latest year for which official government figures are available, exports amounted to $317.7 million and imports totalled $418.0 million, resulting in a trade deficit of about $100.3 million. By far the largest trading partner of American Samoa is the United States, followed by Australia, Japan, New Zealand and Fiji. Imports are mainly food products, fuel and oil, machine parts, building materials, textiles and clothing; 95 per cent of the exports are canned tuna. 5/

B. Public service

12. According to the American Samoa Statistical Digest, 1993, the Government of American Samoa continued to be one of the largest employers in the Territory, accounting for 4,475 persons, or approximately 30 per cent of the employed

labour force. Most of the employees in the public service were American Samoans.

C. Land tenure and agriculture

13. Most land is owned in common by Samoan families and is the traditional basis for family organization. Under the Samoan Land Tenure Act, all land except freehold land (approximately 15 per cent of the total) is inalienable to any person who is less than one-half American Samoan. Without written approval from the Governor, it is unlawful for any matai (chief) to alienate any family lands or to lease such lands for more than 55 years.

14. Apart from freehold land, the main categories are government land (22.8 per cent); church-owned land (13.6 per cent); communal land subject to the native land tenure system (25.1 per cent); and individually owned land, acquired either by court grant after 1900 or through the transfer of communal land with the approval of the Governor (24.5 per cent).

15. During the period under review, sales from the local farmers' market indicated positive growth in the volume of vegetables sold. However, the volume of bananas, taro, breadfruits, coconuts and yams sold on the local market showed a major decline in 1992. 6/

D. Industry

Tuna processing

16. American Samoa's tuna-processing industry, which is the fourth largest in the world, accounts for approximately 20 per cent of total United States tuna production. An Indonesian-owned company, the Van Camp Sea Food Company, and a United States-owned company, Star Kist Samoa, Inc. (H. J. Heinz), operate two large-scale tuna canneries at Pago Pago, which are supplied by both Asian and United States vessels, as well as by a local fleet of small long-line craft.

17. Most of the tuna production is exported to the United States. In 1992, out of a total of $317.7 million in exports from American Samoa, canned tuna exported to the United States amounted to $303.2 million. In the same year, the two canneries provided employment for 4,058 persons and accounted for the bulk of local tax revenues. 7/

18. In 1994, Star Kist was fined $1.8 million by the United States Occupation, Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) for safety and health violations at its American Samoa fish processing plant. The most serious violations reportedly involved the company's failure to safeguard machines and the lack of a corporate strategy to protect workers' safety. OSHA indicates that Star Kist has already made significant progress towards correcting the problems. 8/

Other

19. Other industrial activities in American Samoa are mostly service-oriented. There are a number of small factories processing soap, perfume and alcohol. In 1992, there were 2,118 registered businesses in the Territory, of which retail trade accounted for 34 per cent, and transport and public utilities, for 18 per cent. The remaining industrial activities involved construction, wholesale trade and finance and insurance operations.

20. Efforts to attract new industry to the Territory include tax cuts, import-duty concessions and special lease rates at a large government industrial park located near the airport.

E. Transport and communications

Land

21. There are approximately 150 kilometres of paved roads and 200 kilometres of secondary roads in American Samoa. In 1992, there were 5,518 registered vehicles, 88 per cent of which were privately owned. There is a non-scheduled bus service.

Sea

22. Several shipping companies provide regular service to Pago Pago from Asia, other South Pacific ports and the United States. There is a daily inter-island cargo service and a regular ferry service between American Samoa and Western Samoa. Swains Island is accessible only by boat. Rose Atoll can be visited only by permit since it is a National Wildlife Refuge.

23. In 1992, a total of 927 vessels entered American Samoa, including fishing boats, freighters, yachts and cruise ships.

Air

24. Pago Pago International Airport is regularly served by a number of airlines which link American Samoa with Hawaii and the United States mainland, as well as with Australia, New Zealand and other countries in the South Pacific. The airport has two paved runways, 2,743 metres and 1,829 metres long, respectively. There are also smaller airstrips on the islands of Ofu and Tau.

Radio, television and telephone links

25. American Samoa, through the overseas Communications Satellite corporate link, has direct dialling to most countries. In 1992, the Territory had 8,800 telephones (an increase of 2.3 per cent from 1991), as well as 10 telex and 316 facsimile subscribers. 2/

Newspapers

26. There are several weekly newspapers in the Territory in both the English and the Samoan languages. There is also a daily newspaper, the Samoa News.

F. Tourism

27. Despite the Government's efforts to encourage tourism, the industry remains relatively small. In 1992, 4,710 tourists, a decrease of almost 31 per cent from the 6,830 visitors in 1991, visited the Territory. They were mostly from the United States, Australia and New Zealand. There are five hotels and motels in American Samoa. The Government is the majority shareholder in the main hotel, which has 163 rooms.

G. Financial institutions

28. The Amerika Samoa Bank and a branch of the Bank of Hawaii Federal Credit Union offer complete commercial banking services. The Development Bank of American Samoa, a non-commercial enterprise owned by the Government, issues guarantees and loans for development projects.

29. In October 1993, the National Credit Union Administration, a federal regulatory agency, seized American Samoa's only government employees federal credit union because a large number of delinquencies had led to its financial failure. The union defaulted on $5 million in various loans to the institution and staff expenses. The agency liquidated it in July 1994. 10/

IV. SOCIAL CONDITIONS

A. Labour

30. The labour force in the Territory, which has been steadily increasing since 1980, currently stands at about 15,957 workers. The two largest employers are the Government and the two tuna canneries, which together provide approximately 63 per cent of the jobs. In 1992, the unemployment rate was 14.6 per cent. 11/

31. American Samoa is one of two United States Territories in which employers are allowed to pay workers less than the mainland minimum wage to ensure compatibility with the prevailing cost of living. Approximately 40 per cent of the labour force is from Western Samoa; there are also Tongans, Koreans, Japanese, Chinese and United States citizens working in the Territory. The high proportion of foreign labour comes about because the shortage of well-paying jobs in American Samoa leads many young people to emigrate to Hawaii and the United States mainland. Their place in the Territory is often filled by non-nationals, mostly from Western Samoa (see also para. 32).

B. Immigration

32. American Samoa has its own immigration laws. In 1985, the territorial Government set quotas to regulate the number of foreigners entering the Territory annually to work. The quotas allow the admission of 1,000 persons from Western Samoa and 400 from other countries. Only American Samoans, United States citizens and nationals and licensed companies can sponsor foreign workers.

33. In 1994, 1,200 persons were deported from American Samoa, 250 of them forcibly. Some 80 per cent of the deportees were Western Samoan citizens who had overstayed their visits. Among the balance of overstayers deported in 1994 were Fijians, Tongans, Tuvaluans and Filipinos. 12/

C. Public health

34. The main hospital in the Territory, the Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ) Tropical Medical Center, has 140 beds and a staff of 25 physicians. Medical, dental and pharmaceutical services are available 24 hours a day at minimal cost to residents and visitors. For serious cases, off-island treatment, including hospitalization in Guam, Hawaii or the United States mainland is provided free of charge.

35. The Territory continues to experience problems with drug use. The Governor's Council against Drugs, established in 1987, coordinates efforts to eradicate drug use through a drug-control programme with the joint cooperation of the departments of public safety, customs and human resources and the LBJ Medical Center.

D. Crime and crime prevention

36. In 1992, a total of 2,126 offences were reported to the police, a decrease of 3 per cent compared with 1991. The most common offences were disorderly conduct, assault, burglary, larceny, drunken driving and property damage. 13/

E. Housing

37. In 1992, a total of 895 land use and building permits were issued. There were 580 permits for new structures, 141 for extensions, repair or alteration, 2 for government projects and 172 were for all other types of permits. The estimated value of construction for 1992 was $25 million. 14/

V. EDUCATIONAL CONDITIONS

38. The educational system in American Samoa is broadly based on the United States pattern of eight years' attendance at elementary school and four years' enrolment at high school. In 1992, there were a total of 99 private and public educational institutions, with a total enrolment of 16,644 students. About

44 per cent of students were born outside American Samoa. The majority of foreign-born students were from Western Samoa and the United States. 15/

39. American Samoa Community College, established in 1970, offers two-year degree courses in arts and sciences and certificates of proficiency programmes in vocational skills, business, clerical and nursing curricula. In 1985, the College began a one-year certificate programme in agriculture with specialities in crop production and cattle-raising. Programmes in Pacific studies and computer science were also added to the curriculum through a grant from the United States Federal Government. At the end of 1992, the College had 1,174 students. 16/

VI. PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND ARRANGEMENTS

40. American Samoa is a member of 14 regional organizations, including the South Pacific Commission, the Pacific Basin Development Council, the Pacific Tuna Development Foundation, the Pacific Islands Association, the Asian-South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education, the Pacific Asia Travel Association, the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme and the Council of Pacific Arts. It also belongs to such United States organizations as the National and Western Governors' Conferences. The Government of American Samoa has signed memoranda of understanding with the Governments of Western Samoa and Tonga on mutual economic cooperation and has sent trade missions to a number of countries in the Pacific region.

41. In August 1991, American Samoa, together with two other Territories administered by the United States, Guam and the United States Virgin Islands, established the Alliance of Dependent Territories, an organization that seeks to promote friendly relations and economic and technical cooperation among its members. The Alliance will also endeavour to obtain observer status in the United Nations General Assembly.

42. American Samoa participated as an observer in the Preparatory Committee for the first Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, as well as in the Conference itself, which was held in Barbados from 25 April to 6 May 1994.

43. American Samoa belongs to various regional bodies of the United Nations system, including the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Western Pacific and the WHO Western Pacific Regional Centre for the Promotion of Environmental Planning and Applied Studies. The Territory has been an associate member of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific since 1988.

VII. FUTURE STATUS OF THE TERRITORY

44. In his statement at the seminar organized by the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, held in Papua New Guinea in

June 1993, Mr. Sunia, Lieutenant-Governor of American Samoa, stated that American Samoa preferred to remain a Territory of the United States (see A/AC.109/1159, paras. 25-31).

45. On 9 December 1994, the General Assembly adopted resolution 49/46 B, a consolidated resolution on 10 Non-Self-Governing Territories, section I of which was specifically devoted to American Samoa.

Notes

1/ The information contained in the present working paper was derived from published reports.

2/ American Samoa Statistical Digest, 1993, p. 15.

3/ United States Department of the Interior, Fact Sheet, August 1991.

4/ Pacific Magazine (Honolulu), January/February 1993, p. 9.

5/ American Samoa Statistical Digest, 1993, p. 189.

6/ Ibid., p. 170.

7/ Ibid., pp. 189, 193 and 134.

8/ United Press International, 15 December 1994.

9/ American Samoa Statistical Digest, 1993, pp. 159-160.

10/ American Banker, 5 November 1993, p. 8; and ibid., 22 July 1994, p. 7.

11/ American Samoa Statistical Digest, 1993, pp. 133 and 134.

12/ Agence France Presse, 1 December 1994.

13/ American Samoa Statistical Digest, 1993, p. 73.

14/ Ibid., pp. 89 and 99.

15/ Ibid., pp. 58 and 59.

16/ Ibid., p. 65.